



Fit for the Future? – Woodberry Down Regeneration

By Barbara McFarlane



Woodberry Down was once a huge post-war council estate, conceived by London County Council in the 1930s to alleviate overcrowding. By the 1990's, Hackney was looking at ways to regenerate the estate.

The first masterplan, approved in 2007, intended to provide 4,664 homes, of which 34 per cent were to be for social rent and seven per cent for shared ownership. Of the original 2,013 socially rented homes created, the outline planning application in 2008 stated that 1,458 were still socially rented. Fifteen years on and questions are being asked about the trend of social housing being replaced with expensive private apartments and the way that, despite concerns about climate change, new build leads to higher carbon emissions compared to refurbishing the old housing stock to higher standards.

Before the start of construction in 2009, Hackney Council signed a partnership agreement with Berkeley Homes and Genesis Housing Group, (now Notting Hill Genesis). The plan is to demolish and rebuild to a higher density, aiming



to cross-subsidise the provision of affordable housing by the sale of the new private homes. This financial model is still being used in the current Phase 4 planning application awaiting approval. It is proposed to build 511 new apartments, demolish six existing blocks containing 144 socially rented flats, to be replaced by just 90 new social homes for rent – 17 per cent of the proposed new flats.

The Phase 4 scheme has been densified since the consultation in November 2022, the developer claiming that the requirement for a second escape stair post Grenfell means adding four storeys onto a tower block located at the south end of the scheme to make it 27 storeys. They have

also added an additional storey to all the blocks on the Seven Sisters Road side of the phase. The design is arranged around a raised single courtyard, which the developer calls a 'podium garden'. In reality it will be cramped, overshadowed space which the sun will rarely reach. At the east of the podium the promised 'Town Square' has been demoted to a narrow 'High Street' overshadowed by the tower. Homes overlooking the podium will suffer from lack of privacy, noise and overheating.

The lack of vision and imagination and the degrading of public green space is a depressing departure from the earlier phases that connected with the natural environment. The 'podium' designs are rolled out in the revised third masterplan presented in November 2023 and there are very few opportunities for the looser, more permeable landscape designs with views to both the reservoirs to the south and the New River to the north of Seven Sisters Road. An outline planning application based on this masterplan is due to be submitted in spring 2024 after consultations.

Retail space risks being under-used and popular outdoor spaces disappear. A fresh approach is needed to create a vibrant retail and community presence. It is very sad that market forces and sales strategies cannot accommodate the needs of young people. The masterplan also demolishes The Edge, a youth centre built in 2012, designed by Shephard Epstein and Hunter.

Continued overleaf

Woodberry Down – Map (c) OpenStreetMap and its contributors; Overlay: Paul Bolding
Woodberry Down Phase 4 site Picture: Barbara McFarlane

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Fit for the Future? – Woodberry Down Regeneration continued

Berkeley Homes, in a statement with its 2023 interim results, has also talked of an ‘unsupportive’ operating environment. Is it time to change tack, as Pat Turnbull suggests? Pat is a long-standing Hackney resident and member of the London Tenants Federation. She said of the masterplan:

‘Ought the council not to take another look at the possibility of refurbishing parts of the estate?’.

It appears that regeneration of Woodberry Down is increasingly resulting in a reduction of the number of homes for social rent and does not address the reality of climate

change. Many have suggested that designing the remaining phases needs to be looked at with fresh eyes, focused on a genuine wish to develop a scheme that is socially inclusive and also is in line with changing economic circumstances and Hackney’s Climate Action Plan.

Dalston Kingsland proposals unveiled

The owners of Dalston Kingsland shopping centre, Criterion Capital, have revealed proposals to redevelop the car park and the Matalan store – itself less than 20 years old. They hope to submit a planning application for the development in Spring 2024 following the final round of consultation.

The proposals call for four towers on the triangular site along with lower blocks, providing 257 new homes, more than 3,000 sq m of commercial space including “maker’s units” as well as public open space and “shared residential external amenity”. It says of the scheme heights: “The body

of the blocks are seven storeys, while the tower elements are 12 and 14 storeys.” It says a sunlight study shows minimal impact on Ridley Road market but acknowledges the towers will have a “noticeable impact”. The development will be car free except for blue badge and electric vehicle parking but the car park beneath Sainsbury’s will be preserved. The adjoining Dalston Curve Garden would be untouched in this phase.

The proposals can be viewed and comments left at <https://dalstonkingsland.com/>



Photo: Paul Bolding

View from Martel Place

Planning Inspector cites heritage in refusing Narrow Way application

The Planning Inspectorate has thrown out an appeal over development plans for a site in the Narrow Way and issued a welcome reminder to Hackney Council to consider a range of heritage issues when it finally determines the fate of the site.

The original application for land to the rear of 364 Mare Street, formerly Mermaid Fabrics, would have seen a small infill shop at 364A demolished to provide access, and construction of a five-storey retail and residential block around a courtyard to the rear.

The application was lost in the October 2020 data breach at Hackney Council and the applicant appealed to the inspectorate on grounds of non-determination. They lodged a revised application in 2021 including a four-storey block, which in early 2024 was still awaiting a decision from the council.

The planning inspector, G D Jones, dismissed the appeal and refused the 2020 application.

He said the proposal “would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the [Clapton Square Conservation Area] CSCA and have a harmful effect on the significance of the Grade I listed St Augustine’s Tower, via its

effect on setting.” He concluded that the detriment of the development to the CSCA outweighed the benefits of the proposed development which would remove poor quality infill development and “reintegrate the lost Mermaid Yard into the Mare Street townscape as a public space”.

The outcome of this appeal serves as a reminder to Hackney Council to give due weight to environment and historic character of the Narrow Way, the core of the medieval village of Hackney. The inspector referred to the objection of Historic England which stated that the “historic townscape group” comprised by St Augustine’s Tower, the church of St John and the Old Town Hall “though depreciated by indifferent twentieth-century development in their settings, is of great architectural interest and tells the story of Hackney’s development from medieval village to prosperous Georgian suburb absorbed into Inner London.”

For its own part Hackney Council seems somewhat equivocal about preserving



Photo: Paul Bolding

the character of historic Hackney town centre. The 2012 Area Action Plan, which articulated in detail the significance of the area’s Heritage Assets, has been inexplicably erased in Hackney’s current Local Plan 2033 and the Council has ambitious plans to provide 3,000 additional homes within the (wider) Hackney Central area including redeveloping the Tesco and bus garage sites, on the very margin of Hackney’s historic churchyard. The appeal decision calls for a proper consideration of planning balance and it is to be hoped that the Council notes and respects the tenor of this decision.

Paul Bolding



Photo: Paul Bolding

175 and 179 Church Street.

Concern over listed buildings

Historic England has increased concern over two listed houses in Hackney. Its latest Heritage at Risk register has downgraded numbers 175 and 179 Stoke Newington Church Street, both Grade II listed.

Number 175 is now rated B, meaning “Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric; solution agreed but not yet implemented” and number 179 is rated C or “Slow decay; no solution agreed”. Both were formerly rated the more optimistic D or “Slow decay; solution agreed but not yet implemented”.

Number 175 is a mid-18th century two-storey building of brown brick with red brick dressings, cornice band and parapet, and sash windows, with mid-late 19th century projecting ground floor shop. This was John’s Garden Centre, which closed around 2020.

Historic England said: “The roof is leaking and there are structural issues in evidence,

although the building is propped in places. The building is generally in a very poor condition.”

Number 179 is half of a mid-18th century house, converted to shops in the 19th century. The building, including an unusual 19th century extension to the rear, was Haikksun Chinese restaurant. Historic England said: “There are both structural and asbestos issues. The building has been vacant for several years and is in poor condition.”

There is better news about some of the 34 sites on the Hackney list. The vulnerability of Abney Park Cemetery has improved from Medium to Low amid

recent work to the two entrances and the chapel. (see Spaces issue no 79). And the new owners of 195 Mare Street also known as the New Lansdowne Club, (see Spaces issue no 80), have begun extensive restoration works to the Grade II* listed 1699 house.

The Portico off Lower Clapton Road (see Spaces issue no 78) is due to become home to the Lower Clapton NHS GP surgery in March 2024. Neilcott Construction Group was given an £8.7m contract by Hackney Council to design and build an extension to the portico of the former London Orphan Asylum, dating from about 1823, and undertake the refurbishment works.

Paul Bolding

Library closure

The Grade II listed Stoke Newington library will close from April 2024 for two years for repairs to the roof and fabric of the building.

The library was built in 1892 and extended in 1904 with funding from Andrew Carnegie. A further extension dating from 1922-23 also houses Stoke Newington’s World War One memorial.

Funding of £4.4 million for the work was decided in 2022. The building has been in poor condition for some time and the pavement outside had to be closed last year after masonry fell from the façade. The same Hackney Council document that reported the closure also said one or more libraries could be closed or have hours reduced to save money.



Photo: Peter Altrader

Phone box unsold

A Grade II listed phone box in Stamford Hill of the K6 type designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott was offered for auction in February but went unsold. The guide price was £15,000+. It had planning permission for retail use and a mains electricity connection.

Refurbished memorial

An avenue of 14 trees in Hackney Downs Park that were planted to remember victims of the 1981 New Cross fire is to be refurbished.

The renewed tribute is to be unveiled at noon on 2 March, the 43rd anniversary of the Black People’s Day of Action staged in the wake of the fire that killed 14 young people. Details from gary.collins@ogyg.co.uk .

Noticeboard

Hoxton Gardens clock

The Hoxton Trust celebrates its 40th anniversary in May 2024 and plans to restore the clock in Hoxton Gardens, Hoxton Street, to mark the occasion. The clock and cupola on which it sits were reclaimed from the old Eastern Fever Hospital in Homerton after it was demolished in 1982. The cupola is constructed of wood in baroque style, with a deeply projecting curved eaves cornice and louvered panels.



Photo: Paul Bolding

Hoxton clock

Hackney Design Awards

The Hackney Design Awards for 2024 will be launched in May with winners announced towards the end of the year. The awards are held every two years and are administered by Hackney Council. Awards are divided into several categories including a People's Choice, which is put to a public vote.

Boris demolition



Photo: Paul Bolding

The "Boris" Building in Hertford Road

The saw-tooth glass-roofed factory built in 1913 that formed part of the locally-listed "Boris" building in De Beauvoir has been demolished after planning permission for redevelopment was granted in 2020. New residential and commercial buildings will take over the space. Consent provided for the red-brick building fronting Hertford Road along with the 1887 Mission Hall next door to be repurposed. The proposal provides 2,104 sq m of light/general industrial space, 353 sq m of storage/distribution space and six three-bedroom houses.

RIP Vince McCartney



Courtesy of Holborn Studios

Vince McCartney (left) with David Bailey.

Vincent McCartney, founder of Holborn Studios, died in January after a short illness. A strong supporter of the Hackney Society, in 2017 Vince opened the Society's AGM with a tour of the studios. He founded the business in 1979 in WC1 and it moved to Eagle Wharf Road in 1987. He had been fighting planning applications to redevelop the site since 2012, having failed to acquire the freehold from developers. A planning inspector's inquiry on the most recent application has been ongoing since 2022 and finally opened its public hearing with Vince giving evidence in October 2023. It is expected to reopen in the next few weeks, sadly without its main protagonist.

Hackney History Festival

The first Hackney History Festival takes place from May 10-12, 2024, at several venues in central Hackney. The programme is being developed by Hackney Society, Hackney Archives, Hackney Museum and others.

See <https://hackneyhistoryfestival.org/> for the latest information.

Church gates application

St John at Hackney church has applied for planning permission and listed building consent to install gates across the entrance and exit to the churchyard in Lower Clapton Road. It says it's to deal with anti-social behaviour including drug dealing in the churchyard as well as parking by parents of pupils at the neighbouring Olive School dropping off and picking up children.

Energy application

Community energy group Stokey Energy has applied for planning permission to instal 260 solar panels on the roof of Grade II-listed Woodberry Down School. Its earlier application for solar panels on the roof of the listed Rio Cinema in Kingsland Road was turned down by Hackney Council. Shadow Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero Ed Miliband was photographed with one of Stokey Energy's solar panels projects, on Stoke Newington School & Sixth Form, for a recent Sunday Times magazine article. "Who would have thought there was enough sunshine here in Hackney to make such a difference," Miliband was quoted as saying.

Hackney Society Events

Date for the Diary

West Smithfield, the new London Museum campus – Re-purposing historic industrial buildings

Wednesday 8 May 2024, 6:30pm

Walk with Julian Harrap

More details will be available from a Spacelets email or at hackneysociety.org

£5 for Hackney Society members, £10 for guests

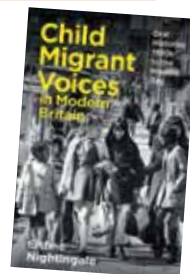
Other Events

Hackney Council offers "family friendly educational walks" with a talk on the history of Springfield Park. Springfield Park E5 9EF

Sundays 10 March and 14 April at 1030. Booking and details on Eventbrite. Free

Publications

Child Migrant Voices in Modern Britain by Eithne Nightingale



Testimonies shed light on children's motivations, trials and achievements, including in adult life, providing insight into how the British – both individually and collectively – have welcomed or shunned child migrants. Eithne Nightingale, who lives in Hackney, links these stories with contemporary issues. Testimonies include several from Hackney children.

Bloomsbury, £16.19 paperback, £49.50 hardback, £12.95 ebook, from www.bloomsbury.com

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